

Testimony in Support of H.B. 6593 With Modification

Hi, my name is Jeremy Otridge and I am testifying in support of H.B. 6593, An Act Concerning Housing Authority Jurisdiction, with modification.

Connecticut is facing an affordability crisis. In addition to not having enough vouchers for all those who need assistance, half of those who receive vouchers are not able to secure housing before their voucher expires¹. While a lack of affordable housing is a factor, the policies of Public Housing Authorities are also at fault. One of the major causes of people not being able to use their vouchers is that Public Housing Authorities do not allow people to use vouchers outside of their jurisdiction. This restriction is driven by federal policy that links funding to how many vouchers are used in a housing authority's jurisdiction. Enabling housing authorities to expand their area of operation would alleviate this pressure to limit the use of vouchers. I am in full support of HB 6593 increasing the ability of housing authorities to assist those that they are tasked with serving.

One section of H.B. 6593 that warrants additional consideration is its policies around the use of criminal records. Section 5 (lines 293-319) discusses what criteria Public Housing Authorities can establish in determining eligibility for public housing units. In stating that housing authorities can consider criminal histories, the bill neglects to consider the time period over which they can be considered (also known as "lookback periods"). Formerly incarcerated people face a myriad of barriers during reentry when trying to access healthcare, employment, and housing². Many formerly incarcerated people are income-eligible for subsidized housing but find this path to stable housing blocked by their criminal records. It is important to establish two facts that highlight the damage of this barrier.

- (1) The Department of Housing and Urban Development has stated that a "**criminal history is not a good predictor of housing success**"³. This statement is supported by research showing that tenants with a criminal history performed similarly well compared to those without a criminal history⁴.
- (2) **Stable housing is a critical resource for preventing recidivism and supporting reentry**⁵. When people do not have stable housing during reentry, they are more likely to recidivate⁶. HUD has recognized this research and stated that "housing restrictions are unlikely to prevent recidivism"⁷.

Legislation and policies that prevent people from accessing housing are counterproductive. Preventing people from legitimately accessing resources necessary for survival is not a recipe for a safe community. Instead of punishing people in perpetuity, we should be offering resources to

¹ <https://www.ctinsider.com/news/article/Half-of-CT-affordable-housing-lottery-winners-17597460.php>

² <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1497911/download>

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<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/FHEO/documents/Implementation%20of%20OGC%20Guidance%20on%20Application%20of%20FHA%20Standards%20to%20the%20Use%20of%20Criminal%20Records%20-%20June%2010%202022.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-frm-asst-sec-051722.html>

⁵ <https://interrogatingjustice.org/challenges-after-release/homelessness-after-reentry-leads-to-higher-recidivism-rates/>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8496894/>

⁷ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight3.html>

help provide stability to them and their communities. Programs around the country have shown the benefits of this new approach of inclusion rather than exclusion⁸. Many of these programs specifically support people who are ineligible for public housing programs because of restrictive lookback periods. The Stable Housing and Reintegration Program (SHARP) run by Justice 4 Housing in Massachusetts is a perfect example⁹. In its first year, SHARP housed 100% of participants, had a 0% recidivism rate, and reunited multiple families. The value of a home cannot be understated, particularly for people who have often been excluded from society. It is a stable platform, a safe space, and a place of healing.

While making vouchers more accessible and functional, you must also consider who needs them most and who can use them. Formerly incarcerated people are 10x more likely to be homeless¹⁰, and the barriers to accessing subsidized housing are a central factor.

In Section 5's rewriting of Section 8-45a of the general statutes, a maximum lookback period should be included. This does not conflict with federal law, which does not prescribe a lookback period. In fact, housing authorities tend to implement excessive lookback periods beyond anything that HUD recommends. **Specifically, Connecticut should implement a maximum lookback period of 3 years.** Over 40 housing authorities use a 3-year lookback period, Seattle lowered it to 0, Los Angeles and Hawaii have a 1-year lookback period, and Michigan only considers drug-related criminal activity in the past year¹¹. In none of these areas have there been reports of increased criminal activity or evictions. Instead, as HUD has highlighted, programs that increase access to housing are leading to lower recidivism rates, healthier families, and improved economic security for thousands. As Connecticut looks to make vouchers more accessible and functional, it must take steps to ensure that these vouchers are usable for all its people.

⁸ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight3.html>

⁹ <https://justice4housing.org/sharp/>

¹⁰ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>

¹¹ <https://justice4housing.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Far-From-Home-Reducing-Barriers-Final-Report.pdf>